

Genesis 22:1-18 – The LORD has Provided

I will always remember the view coming around that last bend on the highway just east of Billings MT. Off on the not-so-distant western horizon we could see the snowy peaks of the Beartooth Range. For people from the hilly but relatively flatter upper Midwest, it was exciting. For the next five days, we would be camping in the last box canyon 50 miles up from the nearest town of any size on the drivable gravel road and hiking further up and into the wilderness fishing for trout.

We'd talk about these trips in years past, the fun and the blunders, the weather, and the wildlife. Not everything was good, but generally the sight of those mountains brought excitement and eagerness to make camp.

I can't imagine the things that must have been going through his mind for those three days of travel as Abraham saw the hills in the distance. I can venture to imagine that most of his thoughts had to be dark and troubled. The LORD had come to him and commanded the unthinkable. ***"Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains there, the one to which I direct you."*** (v.2) His mind had to be virtually screaming as he considered the LORD's command. Think about it from his perspective.

Abraham had been 75 when God had first come to him to make a promise. He and his wife Sarah would have a miracle in their lives – a son through whom blessing would come to all people on earth. And no, God didn't fulfill that promise 9 months later. God chose to have Abraham and Sarah wait...25 years! Finally God fulfilled that promise and Abraham held that miraculous newborn son at the age of 100 (Sarah was 90 when she gave birth!) Go sacrifice that son you waited so long for!

God tells us that it was a test, not for God's benefit. (He knew exactly the measure of faith in Abraham.) It was for Abraham's benefit. Although God's command to sacrifice Isaac was in conflict with God's promise that through Isaac's family the Savior would come, Abraham knew that resolving this conflict was God's business, not his. His business was to obey. And so early the next morning Abraham prepared the wood, sharpened the knife, saddled the donkey, and set out with his son to make the sacrifice. Abraham did all this without debating God's instructions, for Abraham knew that God's commands are to be executed, not questioned.

The Bible does give us a glimpse into the thoughts and heart of Abraham on those days of travel from home to the distant mountain. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, ***"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered Isaac. This man, who received the promises, was ready to offer his only son, about whom it was said, 'Through Isaac your offspring will be traced.' He reasoned that God also had the ability to raise him from the dead, and in a figurative sense, Abraham did receive him back from the dead."*** (11:17-19)

Can you see how Abraham met the test of the LORD? Faith..., not in his own measure of resolve to be strong to meet the challenge, rather faith in the strength of God. God had promised blessing through Isaac, therefore God would make this work out. Strength in ourselves is weak and doomed to fail. Faith in the promises of the LORD? That is a winner every time!

Eventually that mountain received a new name from Abraham: Moriah, which means *"The LORD will provide."* And the LORD did provide that day, didn't He? He provided something solid and certain for Abraham to cling to in the face of counterintuitive uncertainty and fear.

If you haven't heard me say it before, I'll say it now and probably not for the last time: Prayer comes with a risk. The risk is that God will answer your prayer. What does that mean? Think about it this way. Let's say that patience is on your prayer list. *LORD, grant me patience to meet the challenges that make me impatient and anxious.* If we were to be honest, what we're often meaning in that prayer is for God to take away those challenging issues...don't make me face them anymore. But how does God most often answer those sort of prayers? He builds us up in patience. How? By giving us opportunities to face issues that test our limits and exercise our Christian virtues. Therein lies the risk. Strength comes not in ignoring issues, but in facing them.

What about the prayer for stronger faith? Like Abraham, the risk for us is that God puts that to the test for us. Abraham realized that faith didn't focus on his own resolve to be strong. He focused on the promises of the LORD. On that mountain, the LORD did provide...strength and certainty of faith's focus!

Like Abraham, we have learned that a misappropriated focus of faith is a recipe for failure. During those 25 years of waiting, he had tried to work on his own solutions to sort of help God out. An illegitimate child with Sarah's maid, rebuke from God himself for lies and deception all were evidence of failing grades for tests. Like Abraham we have learned to trust in the patience of the LORD who meets our failures with forgiveness and mercy.

On that mountain that day the LORD provided something else. Abraham knew that he would come back off that mountain of sacrifice with a living breathing Isaac. He had revealed his confidence to his servant. ***"Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go on over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you."*** And he did. The LORD provided a substitute sacrifice for his son...a ram caught in the bushes.

Abraham's descendants would offer sacrifices centuries later in the Temple built on this very mountain which would eventually be renamed again, this time to Zion. These sacrifices foreshadowed the death of THE substitute, the Savior. God led Abraham to Mt. Moriah, the very hills on which Jerusalem would be built, the very hills on which Jesus Christ would pour out his life-blood for the sins of the world.

Take that risk, my friends. Pray for a faith like Abraham's. Pray knowing what the answer to that prayer will entail. God will test you. Do so having learned the lesson Abraham learned on that mountain. Face those tests knowing that the LORD will provide. Take the focus off yourself. The LORD will provide a faith that isn't in faith itself. The faith the LORD provides is a faith's that is always focused on the LORD.

Take that risk knowing that we will sometimes and often fail the tests. But that risk really isn't a risk at all in the end, because on that mountain the LORD did provide. Jesus, the blessed descendant of Isaac came to pay for the failed tests of the world.

God will test His people, just like he tested father Abraham, but don't take it for anything except a loving heavenly Father building up his children to face the challenges ahead. Today we begin that annual journey with Jesus on his journey to that hill on which we see beyond all doubt that on that mountain the LORD has provided. Everything. Amen.